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# Analysis of an Early Intervention Reading Program for First Grade Students

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Walden University  
2015

Abstract

Analysis of an Early Intervention Reading Program for First Grade Students

by

Elizabeth Nicole Matthews

MA, Piedmont College, 2010

BS, Georgia College and State University, 2008

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

March 2015

## Abstract

Poor early literacy performance in public elementary schools has been a concern for many years. To that end, the purpose of this study was to examine an Early Intervention Program (EIP) in a public school. First grade students at the participating elementary school struggled with reading skills and were not meeting the grade standards of the local school district. In order to remedy this problem, the school implemented early support to provide struggling students with specific and targeted small group reading instruction. This quantitative program evaluation was intended to explore the effect of the EIP used at the participating elementary school on the reading levels of a convenience sample of 32 struggling first grade readers enrolled in the EIP. The Fountas and Pinnell benchmark reading scores of these students were analyzed using a chi square test to determine the effectiveness of the program. The beginning- and end-of-year benchmark scores showed that students who participated in the program for an entire school year demonstrated growth in their reading levels so that every student in the program was reading on or above grade level. Based on this research, an evaluation report was prepared and included recommendations for possible expansion of the program and teacher professional development focused on reading intervention. This research could help promote positive social change through teacher professional development and allow classroom teachers to receive targeted reading intervention training. These results from the study help to improve student achievement and foster a school environment that is data driven and student achievement centered to support student learning.

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated first to God. Without him, none of this would have been possible. I would also like to dedicate this work to my husband and my children. The three of you inspire me on a daily basis to be the best I can be. I would also like to dedicate this work to my parents who have supported me every day.

## Acknowledgments

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
Table 1 .....	iv
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem .....	2
Rationale .....	3
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level.....	3
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	6
Definitions.....	8
Significance.....	9
Guiding/Research Question .....	10
Implications.....	26
Summary .....	27
Section 2: The Methodology.....	29
Introduction.....	29
Methodology .....	31
Research Design.....	31
Procedures for Study.....	32
Instrumentation and Materials .....	34
Section 3: The Project.....	41
Introduction.....	41



Description and Goals .....	41
Rationale .....	42
Review of the Literature .....	43
Early Intervention in State Public Schools .....	43
Program Evaluation .....	44
Implementation .....	46
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	47
Potential Barriers .....	47
Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others .....	47
Implications Including Social Change .....	48
Local Community .....	49
Far-Reaching.....	49
Conclusion .....	51
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	53
Introduction.....	53
Project Strengths .....	53
Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations .....	54
Scholarship.....	56
Project Development and Evaluation.....	57
Leadership and Change.....	58
Analysis of Self as Scholar, Practitioner, and Project Developer.....	59
The Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change.....	60

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research .....	62
Conclusion .....	63
References .....	65
Appendix A: State EIP Rubric .....	84
Appendix B: Evaluation Report.....	85

## List of Tables

Table 1.....	27
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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

Reading plays a vital role in a student's education. According to Lyons (2003), "learning to read is critical to students' academic success and has a tremendous impact on their emotional and social development throughout life" (p. 2). The acquisition of appropriate reading skills provides students with success academically, socially, and emotionally. These skills are taught early in life during the first years of elementary school. According to Lyons and Weiser (2009), not all children grasp these skills in the early years and some children begin to struggle with rudimentary reading skills. According to National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores, "roughly one-third of U.S. students read at or above the proficient level, one-third read at the basic level, and one-third read at the below basic level" (Rampey, Dion, and Donahue, 2009, p. 479). Reading is an important life skill, yet many students are falling behind in reading skills at an early age and schools are struggling to meet the demands of these readers. Ritchie (2014) explained that students who do not receive early assistance in learning to read are subject to missing out on the important, intelligence-boosting properties of literacy. The important lifelong skills of literacy are a concern for all involved with the students, including parents, educators, and policymakers alike (Meier, 2009).

The students who are below grade level in reading are often serviced through the use of remedial reading programs. One such program is the Early Intervention Program (EIP), designed to provide small group remedial reading instruction with the goal to improve literacy skills. This state-designed program uses the small group pull out model,

where groups of seven to 14 students are taken to another classroom to receive specific reading instruction. In this study, I examined the reading progress of first grade students (ages six and seven) who are identified as struggling readers and who received additional reading instruction in the EIP.

In this program evaluation, I addressed and assessed the relationship between the reading levels of first grade students before and after participating in the intervention program. The children are enrolled in the program based on the assessed reading level and receive daily 30-minute small group reading instruction.

### **Definition of the Problem**

First grade students at the participating elementary school struggle with reading skills and strategies and thus are not meeting the grade set standards set before them by the local school district. According to the local school district, roughly 30% of their first grade students read below grade level standards. Early reading problems can lead to future academic problems and students may continue to struggle throughout school. Landerl and Wimmer (2009) reported that 70% of struggling readers in Grade 1 continued to struggle in Grade 8 when no intervention was provided. To aid in combating this problem and meeting student needs, teachers identify struggling students and remediate with literacy instruction. Reading intervention programs are prevalent in the education system, but according to Cohen, Furman, and Moser (2007), scholarship on the validity and effectiveness of these programs is scarce. This project study was designed to examine the relationship between literacy levels before and after participation in the intervention program for students who are identified as struggling readers. This data

contributes to the current body of literature and a better understanding of the local problem.

### **Rationale**

#### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

This local problem has been chosen because of its direct impact on elementary students' reading abilities. Students who measure below grade level standards have not achieved the necessary skills and knowledge and require extra assistance to reach grade level standards set forth by the county. Teachers identify these students through the use of the Benchmark Reading Assessment (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009a), an evaluation system to determine a student's reading level. The school district requires the use of this assessment to verify independent and instructional reading levels and indicate where students fall within the allocated standards. In terms of reading instruction, "the benchmark is the level of a text a reader can process effectively that is, with high accuracy and comprehension" (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009b, p. 45). In order to identify appropriate placement, the classroom teacher administers the assessment to individual students. In these contexts, the student orally reads an unfamiliar text while the teacher records miscues, omissions, additions, and errors. McAllenney and Coyne (2015) explained that poor achievement in these assessed areas is indicative of an increased risk of failure in reading and the student should be targeted for intervention. Comprehension is assessed through questioning the reader and having the reader recall specific information and details of the text. "Reading comprehension is a multi-dimensional process that includes the reader, the text, and factors associated with the activity of

reading” (Lipka and Siegel, 2012, p. 1873). This process, called *running records* (Clay, 2000), is commonly used as an assessment tool in many elementary classrooms and assigns the student to a level from one to 26. The participating elementary requires a benchmark of level 18 for promotion at the end of first grade. It is also expected that a student entering first grade at the participating school be proficient in level four. Students entering the first grade year not proficient at level four are considered to be below standards and struggle to reach requirements for promotion.

Teachers in the district under study are required to evaluate every student using the Benchmark Assessments once every 9 weeks. Huang and Konold (2014) argued that when attempting to narrow the reading achievement gap, the use of research-based assessments that can facilitate the identification of children who are at risk of future reading difficulty is the best approach. The data scores were then recorded on a student growth spreadsheet to note and track student progress. Upon reviewing these spreadsheets, it was apparent that a significant number of first grade students at the participating elementary school were not meeting the requirements, with 30% of the grade level below the minimum grade level standard. The intervention teacher then evaluated these data scores to determine modifications and interventions for instruction. The 20 students who received the lowest scores on the assessments are referred to the EIP. According to the State Department of Education, the EIP program operates in order to provide extra instructional resources to students performing below grade level. The program was designed and implemented for struggling students to receive the necessary remediation in order to make gains in their reading.

The state department of education (DOE), as a mandate of State Code 20-2-153, sets aside specific EIP plans for staffing, class sizes, student eligibility, and delivery models. The code also dictates that each local district board of education design and provide students from kindergarten to fifth grades with EIP services if they qualify by using benchmark scores to determine if the students are eligible. The state provides funds for one full time state-certified teacher with the requirement that all data is reported yearly to the state.

In the state of study the design of EIP is deliverable through a choice of five models: (a) the augmented or inclusion model, where the EIP works directly in the regular education classroom along with the classroom teacher; (b) the pull out model, in which the EIP teacher takes the students out of the regular classroom and works in small groups in a separate classroom; (c) the self-contained model, where the students operate in a small classroom aside from the regular classroom; (d) the combination classroom with reduced size, where EIP and non-EIP students work in a smaller sized classroom model; and (e) the Reading Recovery method, where trained Reading Recovery teachers work one on one with the student (DOE, 2013). The choice of the model of instruction was given to the local school principals and they determined how they wished to utilize the program and teachers to meet the needs of students.

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of the Reading EIP to determine the reading progress of the students as a result of the intervention. The students received guided small group instruction tailored to fit their instructional reading levels. This intervention was a daily 30- minute small group lesson that utilized direct and



individualized instruction on reading skills, strategies, fluency, and comprehension.

Students who may struggle with reading for their academic career can receive the needed services to improve reading and academic success. These students were assessed weekly to determine what further instruction they will need.

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

The United States has a national literacy problem (Goldhaber, 2011; Mathes et al., 2005; Mellard and Jordan, 2010; Moore-Hart and Karabenick, 2009). Some students lack the necessary literacy skills and a strong foundation for reading. “Reading difficulties are the most frequent learning problem among students and the main reason for academic failure” (Rasinski and Hoffman, 2003, p. 43). Reading is a critical element to academic success and schools are facing a challenging time in providing quality-reading instruction to all students. Reading skills extend across all academic areas and into future arenas of life. Allor, Mathes, Roberts, Cheatham, and Otaiba, 2014, explained that successes in life such as employment and quality of life can be greatly influenced by reading ability. Students who struggle with reading and do not receive quality remediation and assistance can face continuing struggles throughout their academic careers. Alstrom et al. (2011) reported that struggling children in schools who are not receiving remediation are making little to no progress. It is essential that these students receive the interventions needed, as Vaughn, Denton, and Fletcher (2010) explained that students with these reading difficulties require intense intervention. In conjunction with budget cuts and limited resources, teachers are required to teach more difficult and demanding standards and take on extra responsibilities.

The implementation of Common Core Standards (2010) throughout the country in certain states has established higher learning standards. These standards are nationwide learning requirements that are “designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers” (Common Core, 2013, p. 1). According to Allington (2009), these standards in the area of reading provoke literacy instruction that is much deeper than that of the past. Students are required to not only read a more complicated text, but to think about what they have read and explain their thinking.

Teachers work diligently to comply with and maintain the high level of standards but continue to be faced with limited resources and budget restrictions. Funding in the local district has been greatly reduced. Olaff, Mai, and Leachmen (2012) explained, that budget cuts within schools can be counterproductive and not supportive of the purpose of educational reforms or the local schools and can produce negative consequences for the country economically. Mandated programs are not receiving sufficient funding and unable to reach their maximum potential, which can lead to long term deficits for the country in terms of career ready citizens.

Remediation in the stages of emergent reading is critical, as studies have shown that reading problems of students with reading difficulties continue throughout the school years (Dickinson and McGabe, 2001). The standards and academic achievements demands increase, and students are not reaching these points. Juel (1988), in a longitudinal study, found that 88% of students who are poor readers at the end of first grade remain poor readers in fourth grade. Babayigit and Sainthorp (2010) found that

children who are slow readers in first grade continue to be slow readers in second grade and make a greater number of reading errors compared to their peers. Providing aid to these students is essential as early literacy levels are important indicators of a child's future reading success, and early detection and intervention plays a key role in future academic success. Blachman et al. (2014) explain that continued reading disabilities and difficulties can have present negative emotional and future economic consequences for the students. Al Otaiba et al. (2010), state that identifying students as early as prekindergarten and kindergarten may be a critical piece of the literacy puzzle. Early identification and remediation play a key role in helping struggling students.

### **Definitions**

*Benchmark assessments:* The level of a text a reader can process effectively, that is, with high accuracy and comprehension (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009).

*Early Intervention Program (EIP):* According to the state DOE, the purpose of the program is to provide additional instructional resources to help students who are performing below grade level obtain the necessary academic skills to reach grade level performance in the shortest possible time.

*Frustration reading level:* A student has several errors when reading and cannot access the text quickly. They also have very little background knowledge about the passage. The frustration level is determined by 90% or below word recognition and comprehension questions are below 70% accuracy (Fountas and Pinnell, 1999).

*Independent reading level:* The level where a student can access the text very quickly, has no errors, and reads with 100% accuracy when reading. Additionally, the

reader has significant background knowledge, which assists in his or her comprehension (Fountas and Pinnell, 1999).

*Instructional reading level:* The level at which a student can access text quickly. The student has a few errors and a strong amount of background knowledge to assist with comprehension. This level is often known as the student's current reading level where the student is receiving leveled text as well as coaching. This level is indicated by 90-94% accuracy with satisfactory comprehension and 95-100% accuracy in word recognition with limited comprehension (Fountas and Pinnell, 1999).

*Literacy:* Literacy is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential. It requires word level reading skills and higher-level literacy skills (White and McCloskey, 2003).

*Reading Recovery:* Developed by Marie Clay, Reading Recovery is a short-term intervention (12-20 weeks) for first graders who have extreme difficulty with early reading and writing. The student receives daily one on one instruction for 30 minutes with a trained instructor. Students read text based on their instructional levels and work on specific literacy skills (Reading Recovery, 2013).

*Struggling readers:* Students who do not master the skills taught in the general reading lessons in class (Gettinger and Stoiber, 2007). These students are often a grade level below according to reading standards and lack reading skills needed.

### **Significance**

Difficulties in reading are one of the most significant problems currently facing students (Lancaster and Reisener, 2013). Young children need both overall language

skills related to vocabulary and conceptual world knowledge and the literacy-based skills of letter knowledge and letter–sound correspondence (Carnine, Silbert, Kame’enui, Tarver, and Jungjohann, 2006). Young children who struggle with emergent literacy have been described as readers who have not learned “to orchestrate their knowledge of language, of the world, and of print, and how it works” (Pinnell, Fried, and Estice, 1990, p. 282). Such children need support in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, text comprehension, and vocabulary (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000). Vadsay and Sanders (2013) explain that many beginning readers must master the skills of decoding and be able to recognize printed words. Learning to read is a prerequisite for a successful life that affects the entire society, in that individuals are more productive, contributing members of society if they are able to extrapolate meaning from text (Paris, 2005; Paris and Paris, 2007). The first grade students at the participating elementary school who were below the current grade level standards in reading need the extra support and direct instruction to improve their reading skills and to aide in their future academic success. Vaughn et. al (2009) explained that over time teachers view students who are at risk for reading problems to have lower academic competence. The importance of these factors led to this research study, in which I evaluated the effectiveness of a reading EIP designed to aid struggling readers with literacy skills.

### **Guiding/Research Question**

No evaluation information or data analysis exists for the current EIP program being implemented at the local school (intervention teacher, personal communication,

January 2013). This study analyzed the presently implemented EIP program to determine its effectiveness on the reading levels of struggling first grade students. The evaluation was guided by an overarching and guiding research question.

Overarching Research Question: What is the effectiveness of the Early Intervention Program used at the participating elementary school on the reading levels of struggling first grade readers?

Guiding Research Question: What is the effectiveness of the Early Intervention Program on the reading progress of struggling readers?

### **Review of the Literature**

The review of literature was compiled from Boolean searches through the Walden University Library and its databases. These databases include ProQuest, ERIC, and Education Research Complete. The databases provided peer reviewed articles and required extensive scanning and critiquing of the articles, data, methods, and conclusions. The key search terms were *literacy, common core, early intervention reading program, Fountas and Pinnell, benchmark reading assessments, reading foundations, early literacy, early reading development, and stages of reading*. Many of the selected articles were written by people who are considered early literacy experts and were published after 2009. The research also included textbooks, books written by literacy researchers, and data from state and local governments.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cognitive theory focuses on learning as the activities that occur inside the mind (Leonard, 2002; Piaget, 1952, 1954, 1977). The theory views the learner as an active

participant in their learning process and changes that occur display the learning that occurs within the mind. Knowledge is viewed as abstract mental constructions (Leonard, 2002; Piaget, 1952; Piaget, 1954; Piaget, 1977). The cognitive theory has four main principles, including (a) knowledge could be reconstructed based on novel experiences and information, (b) the learner must be aware of his or her learning and knowledge was facilitated by self-monitoring of the learner's process and capabilities; (c) learning was influenced by the context in which it occurred and a function of the quantity and quality of the learner's processing; and (d) learning was an active practice of building organized mental structures based on processing and storing new information in relation to previously learned information (Piaget, 1952; 1954; 1977). These principles allow the student to engage in the exploration and creation of new knowledge. The teacher facilitates but allows these students to use experiences to build new mental structures. The cognitive model of learning is used during the small group instruction in EIP to provide students with new knowledge of reading skills.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Identifying reading issues or concerns at the primary level allows for early detection and intervention. "Early intervention is a way to provide struggling students with early, effective instruction as well as a valid means of assessing students' needs" (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2008, p. 95). EIP can contribute to raising student achievement and preventing further reading problems in students. Taub and Szente (2012) explain, "Without early intervention, all students experiencing difficulty acquiring reading skills in the early grades may never read adequately" (p. 361). In EIP, early literacy students at

the emergent phase of reading can master skills such as building phonological awareness, letter sound and word recognition, reading comprehension, spelling, sequencing, and predication. “Reading interventions target specific skills students are lacking in the areas of word recognition, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing” (Morgan, Compton, Cordray, and Fuchs, 2008, p. 389). All of these skills contribute to the overall reading achievement level for the student. Brady (2011) expressed that remediation and early intervention can reduce the incidence of reading failure.

There are various methods and intervention programs available in schools. Extra pull out programs such as The Boulder Program (Hiebert, Colt, Catto, and Gury, 1992) and Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985; Clay, 1993; Clay, 1993a; Pinnell, 1989; Pinnell, Fried, and Eustice, 1990), which are now used in conjunction with one another, are common reading intervention programs. These intervention methods focus on a one-on-one ratio with one teacher and one student and/or in a small group setting in addition to classroom instruction. Another method is the Early Intervention in Reading Program (EIR; Taylor, Frye, Short, and Shearer, 1992; Taylor, Strait, and Medo, 1994), which utilizes regular education first and second grade teachers to provide a small group of five to six struggling readers with an extra 10 minutes of reading instruction and exposure to literature daily. Cunningham, Nathan, and Raher (2011) contribute added print exposure to the development of word recognition, literacy gains, and automaticity. This program occurs within the regular classroom and does not require an additional teacher to pull out the students; however, teachers receive nine months of professional training to implement



the program within their classrooms. This training focuses on a deep understanding of struggling students and the foundation of reading.

### **Reading Theory and Learning to Read**

Reading requires several complex cognitive processes of the brain. Many theorists have studied how child learn information, process information, and transfer that information. Jean Piaget, a renowned educational theorist, developed theories and stages of cognitive development. His stages of cognitive development, particularly preoperational and operational, give educators an insight into the learning of young readers. Piaget's beliefs belong to the area of constructivism, a theory in which young learners construct their learning from their life experiences (Scull and Bianco, 2010). Young readers begin to learn from the world around them and use the memories and experiences during their cognitive process of reading written text. Culatta (2013) explained, "reading is closely related to the many other cognitive processes of the brain such as attention, concept formation, imagery, language, memory, and perception" (p. 204). Beginning readers start with this process as they identify letters, sounds, and whole words. As they further develop cognitively they can then begin to comprehend written words, infer when reading, and explain written language. Tompkins (2012) further explains the cognitive theory connection with reading and how learning can be the adaptation of mental diagrams or mental file cabinet where new information is stored. Constructivists rely heavily on whole language, instruction based on content, and phonological reading theory when teaching children to read.

Phonological reading theory relies on the identification of letters and their specific sounds and is an important step in learning to read. Meier (2012) reported that reading begins to take place by first decoding letter sound relationships, then understanding syllables, words, sentences, and eventually paragraphs. When students are instructed using the phonological method they are required to recognize letters and their corresponding sounds. The International Reading Association (2012) explained that phonological awareness encompasses large units of sound, syllables, onsets, and rhymes. Phonological awareness is a crucial beginning step of early reading and only after the student has achieved this skill they then begin to progress to blending the phonemes together to create full words.

The International Reading Association (2012) also reported that phonemic awareness abilities in kindergarten appear to be the best single predictor of successful reading acquisition.

### **Stages of Reading**

Reading involves more than saying words. “It involves reading words in phrases, phrases in sentences, and sentences that communicate a bigger message” (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009, p. 49). Reading involves decoding words, reading them fluently and with expression, and being able to comprehend what has been read. A successful reader is able to read the text the way it is was written and intended by the author and comprehend what has been read. Indrisano and Chall (1996) identified six stages of reading development that occur in students learning to read. These stages and model of reading focused on the

development of the child and the cognitive ability needed by the student to progress and reach new stages of reading learning and progression.

Reading in the education setting is often taught in stages. The first stage, according to Indrisano and Chall (1996), is known as pre reading or stage zero. This stage begins from birth until age 6. “Children experiment with the alphabet at their first opportunity to make connection between letters, words, and spoken language” (Indrisano, and Chall, 1995, p. 8). This experimenting is often seen when children learn how to properly hold a book, turn the pages, track the print, and use the pictures to help them create stories. This stage will move into kindergarten as students begin to receive explicit reading instruction and guidance.

In stage 1 during first grade students are able to decode and identify words and the principle of the alphabet. They begin to learn to read and understand language. Willingham (2009) stated language is the primary medium through which people learn and acquire the ability to think and reason. Students are expected to learn and understand various decoding skills and strategies and apply them when reading a text. Students at this stage also learn to focus and comprehend the text they are reading. Compton et al. (2012) explains that language has the strongest link to reading comprehension. As the level evolves comprehension plays a greater role and often has to be taught by direct instruction from the teacher to ensure students accurately comprehend the texts they are reading.

In stage 2 during second and third grades fluency increases and students become more familiar with complex texts. Denton et al. (2010) explain that fluency is more

difficult than other skills to bring to meeting grade level standards. Students have a strong understanding of decoding and shift their focus from word recognition to whole text and work to increase their fluency while reading.

Stages 1 and 2 are very critical for young readers. In these stages they are building the foundation for reading skills. It is important they master the skills in this stage to promote future success. “Some readers take longer than others to pass through this stage and unfortunately; there are many intermediate and secondary struggling readers who never climb out” (Bear, Negrete, and Cathey, 2012, p. 7). This process should be a smooth transition from the readers moving from stage 1 to stage 2 throughout first through third grade. This movement occurs very easily for students who do well in reading, but often readers who struggle cannot make this transition smoothly.

Stage 3 begins when young readers begin to read for information. Munsen (2010) explains that in this stage students’ shift from learning to read to reading to learn. This shift often occurs in late elementary school to middle school. Students venture from familiar texts to find new and challenging works that engage them as readers. This stage is where comprehension begins to play a vital role. “As students grow older and are confronted with more complex and cognitively demanding texts then comprehension difficulties can begin to appear” (Miciak et al., 2014, p. 409). They also began to directly seek information from the written texts.

The final stages, 4 and 5, span to high school and college level readers. All reading skills have been acquired by this age and development. Students are reading texts for information at a higher level. Students are often reading assigned texts during these

stages. Without a strong foundation of these stages the link from one stage to another can be lost for students and put them at risk for future academic struggles.

These stages build on one another to create a successful reader. Students need an effective reading program to engage in quality reading experiences and provide a strong reading foundation. Early detection of struggling readers and providing them with intervention is critical. Students must receive a literacy base early in life and when they are behind in comparison to other students they will need further assistance.

### **Effective Reading Education**

A core-reading program is a daily block and reading education in the classroom. “The core reading program should be 90-120 minutes a day” (Pinnell and Fountas, 2009, p. 14). The daily reading block used in the regular classroom is most effective when a sufficient amount of time is allowed. Gallagher (2009) recommends the amount of writing, text based discussions, and reading in classrooms be tripled. “The core program is strongly supported through a balanced approach that creates multiple environments in which teachers use various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and child control” (Frey, et al, 2005, p. 276). The approach allows for opportunities for teacher centered and student learning as well as both skills and meaning based learning.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) Report (2000) and the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) report (2008) findings for effective reading instruction strategies for children and reviewed more than 100,000 studies on reading and compiled their results. The report identified the following elements are essential for students to successfully learn to read: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency.

A basis for beginning reading instruction includes phonemic awareness. The National Institute of Child and Human Development (NICHD, 2000) defines phonemic awareness as “the ability to notice, think about and work with the individual sounds in spoken words” (p. 1). Phonemes are the smallest unit of the spoken language. In phonemic awareness students learn to blend the sounds in written words by using letters and the knowledge of the sounds they create when spoken. In order to improve phoneme skills, Ryder, Tunmer, and Greaney (2008) suggest focusing early on phonological based literacy skills to reduce the achievement gap in struggling students. Early effective phonemic awareness instruction for students is often taught through songs and rhymes and can provide the skills and knowledge necessary for later reading skills.

Phonics instruction is a second component of reading instruction. In 2000 the United States’ National Reading Panel advocated systematic phonics instruction as part of a balanced program of teaching reading (NICHD, 2000). Phonics instruction focuses on the link between letters and the sounds they represent. The instruction aims to help readers make the link when reading or decoding and spelling or encoding. In phonics instruction students also learn to blend and segment as well as to learn grapheme-phoneme correspondences, which involve matching letters and their sounds.

Vocabulary is also critical. Reynolds, Wheldall, and Madelaine (2010) explain that once a child creates discongruity in vocabulary, then the issue will linger. The lexicon level is developed early in life before students enter school and each student will arrive in classrooms with varying vocabularies and capabilities. “By the end of second grade, the children with strong vocabularies know between 4,000 and 8,000 more word

meanings than students with weak vocabularies” (Biemiller, 2004, p. 30). “A limited vocabulary makes it more difficult to solve words, because the new words they encounter are either unknown or seldom used” (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009, p. 34). The impact of a limited vocabulary can hinder a student’s reading ability. It is particularly important to identify children in the early grades with low language and vocabulary levels and intervene in ways designed to improve their vocabulary knowledge and as a result improve reading comprehension outcomes (Butt 2011; Fien, et al, 2011; Wood, Harmon, and Taylor, 2011). The early identification of struggling reading students can help close the achievement gap and improve their early literacy skills.

Another key component of effective reading is comprehension. Comprehension refers to student’s ability to recall and understand what they have read. It is a complex and cognitive process that requires active student engagement and direct instruction of skill from the teacher. Triplett and Buchaan (2005) suggest promoting conversations related to literacy and comprehension in the intervention program. It is important for educators to understand students’ cognitive base and the processes of development. “Such understanding can have far-reaching implications for educational practice, particularly with respect to assessment, diagnosis, and early intervention of reading difficulties” (Broek, Kendeou, Lousberg, and Visser, 2011, p. 262). At the emergent stage of literacy, where majority of first grade instruction takes places, students’ comprehension is largely based on their previous experiences, interactions, and understandings. Dooley (2010) suggested that a child’s knowledge is developed from early interactions and is directly related to their comprehension ability. Comprehension is

a key literacy skill and should be focused on during early literacy development and intervention.

Fluency is another component of reading instruction, and according to Rasinski (2010) is a key to proficient reading. Fluency refers to a student's ability to read with speed, accuracy, and expression. Grabe (2010) proposed that fluency is characterized by cognizance of sentence arrangement and also the ability to comprehend the author's written text. When reading a teacher listens to the way a student reads the word to understand their knowledge of the written text. Fluency is composed of three components: accuracy, automaticity, and prosody (Kuhn and Stahl, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000). Reutzel (2009) expresses that fluency should include the decoding, rate of reading, use of volume, pitch, stress, and juncture. Accuracy is reading the word correctly, automaticity is the immediate recognition of the word rather than using a decoding strategy, and prosody is using inflection in the voice and thus reading with expression. Gibson, Cartledge, and Keyes (2011) stated that readers who lack fluency often read slowly, lack expression, and disregard punctuation, so that the material often is meaningless to them. When students read fluently they are able to read the words as the author wrote them.

### **Instructional Formats**

These reading skills are often taught through guided reading groups. "Guided reading is a teaching approach used with all readers, struggling or independent, to meet the varying instructional needs of all the students in the classroom, enabling them to greatly expand their reading powers" (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001, p. 17). Guided reading



involves selecting a text, introducing a text, reading a text, discussing and revising the text, teaching for processing strategies, extending meaning of text, and working with words. Iaquina (2006) expressed that using these components together created a solid reading foundation for the students to build their comprehension skills. Teachers continually teach phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills. Teaching these skills allows the teachers to meet consistently with students and assess their progress as well as the opportunity to decide when intervention is necessary for students.

Many researchers have analyzed intervention programs and the frameworks of their lessons. The study of reading intervention and its effect on student achievement has been prominent in the area of reading research. A pioneer in the field of reading intervention is Marie Clay. Her model of reading intervention, Reading Recovery, is renowned for the major improvements it makes in student reading achievement. The program produces successful results and “approximately 75% of students who complete the full 12- to 20-week intervention can meet grade-level expectations in reading and writing” (Reading Recovery, 2013). In this model the bottom 20% of the first graders, based on reading assessments, are pulled out of the classroom to receive daily one on one reading instruction. Wasik and Salvin (1993) determined that reading recovery helped to improve student reading so well that students were able to reading significantly higher than students in the control group. Reading Recovery provides in depth and instruction and support for struggling readers. Cunningham and Allington (1994) reported that Reading Recovery proves to have the highest success rate of all intervention programs.

Although the program is highly successful and provides strong results many schools cannot continue to offer Reading Recovery because of its high cost and must utilize the foundation of a program but adjust it to use in a group setting rather than one on one.

### **Struggling Readers**

Reading is an integral part of today's educational system and "children who experience difficulties reading and understanding information that is presented to them tend to suffer from problems in school and their communities" (NCES, 2010, p. 8, Morrow and Mendel, 2011). Children who struggle in reading are at greater risk for issues and problems during their lives. Hiebert and Taylor (2000) explained that the earlier the students receive the intervention then the higher chance they have of meeting standards. Reading in the educational setting is crucial to the foundation for learning and is required in today's present society. Broek, Kendeou, Lousberg, and Visser (2010) expressed that we must first understand the processes of reading comprehension and how to utilize them to assist students. Educators must recognize this problem and take the precautions to aid the students.

Gettinger and Stoiber (2007) stated that struggling readers are students who do not master the skills taught in the general reading lessons in the class. These struggling students often lack a deep understanding of language, words, phonics, and comprehension. This lack and gap in learning can create long term reading problems for the students.

### **Reading Intervention**

Reading EIP is an avenue within the schools to assist students who need extra help with reading. Sideridis et al. (2006) recommended that the interventions operate in small groups or one-on-one sessions that offer support along with demonstration, consultation, and mentoring. Intervention programs allow students to receive additional instruction in a small group environment that promotes needed individualized attention. Pikulski (1997) identified that the programs provide valuable instruction, remediation, and prevention. Small group intervention and instruction allows struggling reading students to receive more individualized reading instruction. With the reauthorization of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) in 2004, a new model of intervention and assessment began in schools to help with students who are identified as having learning problems (Koutsoftas, Harmon, and Gray, 2009). This legislation allowed for various methods of intervention programs to begin in schools.

Many students receive the necessary and sufficient amount of reading instruction from classroom instruction. However, there are students who do not receive the sufficient amount of instruction. Fountas and Pinnell (2009) have recommended that students who may show early signs of reading confusions receive early intervention. Providing students with early interventions can provide them with a better opportunity for academic improvement and success.

Researchers continue to study the impact of early intervention, such as Goldstein (2011), who reported that progress continues to be made steadily in the area of preventing reading disabilities in the area of early childhood. This recent research has aided educators to understand and identify students who struggle with reading and appropriate

interventions. Chapman and Tunmer (2003) have reported that if students are still struggling in third grade then they are likely to have continuing reading difficulties throughout their years in school. The earlier that the students are identified as struggling and begin to receive the necessary interventions the more likely they are to have continued reading success in their academic future.

Wasik and Salvin (1993) reviewed research regarding a comprehensive approach to providing early interventions, describes reading as a complex process rather than the building of specific skills in isolation. Five first grade early intervention programs were analyzed by Wasik and Salvin (1993) through the lens of 16 research studies. It was determined that programs that focus on reading as a comprehensive subject (e.g. Reading Recovery) had a more long term positive effect on student reading achievement rather than programs that focused on the isolated teaching of reading skills. The programs focused on teaching print concepts, decoding, comprehension, and self-monitoring. “Intervention programs that use a comprehensive approach to improve and develop students’ literacy skills in the areas of comprehension, fluency, and word study” (Hiebert and Taylor, 2000; Honig et al., 2008; Pinnell and Fountas, 2009). The limitation for this study is that these programs offer one on one instruction and the cost is often too great for school system to provide.

Morgan, Fuchs, Compton, Cordray, and Fuchs (2008) studied the relationship between early reading failure and students’ motivation. Sixty first-grade students at different reading levels were randomly assigned in a pretest-posttest control design group. The studies focused on three aspects of reading motivation and were then assessed

in the areas of competency beliefs, task orientation, and intrinsic motivation. Specifically in relation to competency beliefs, the findings indicated that low-skilled readers who were not given reading interventions perceived themselves as less competent readers and had a negative attitude toward reading across pre- and post treatment than did higher leveled readers. The study also discovered that by the middle of first grade, a relationship emerged between reading skills and competency beliefs. Poor or lower level readers trailed behind the higher skilled readers in their competency beliefs and reading practice. The study suggests interventions may need to target low skilled readers' motivation and competency beliefs early in students' formal schooling. Toste et al (2014) explain that early identification of students who are at-risk of reading difficulties and subsequent intervention can enhance likelihood of positive learning outcomes. An early intervention program can aid students in their reading skills as well as increase their competency beliefs in their abilities.

### **Implications**

This program evaluation assessed the effectiveness of the reading EIP for first grade students at the school under study. The office of educational assessment (2014) describes program evaluation as the assessment of the processes and/or outcomes of a program with the intent of furthering its development or improvement. The purpose of the program evaluation was to determine the effect of the intervention program on first grade students' literacy skills. I chose to implement this program evaluation to determine if the current EIP program is meeting the needs of the students. It was necessary to evaluate the intervention program to ensure the program and schools are in line with the

current curriculum. This study used benchmark assessment data to determine if first grade student's literacy skills and reading levels improved as a result of the intervention. The objective of this evaluation was to present evidence to the local school board, as well as to teachers to determine if the EIP program is able to meet the needs of the students. It is important that the effectiveness of the program was evaluated to understand if the needs of the students are being met. The number of students reading below grade level continues to grow and educators must meet the growing demands of students who lack grade level appropriate literacy skills. It is important to local school administrators and teachers to determine if placing the students into the EIP program is an effective instructional practice.

### **Summary**

Reading is essential to continued future academic success. Teachers, school officials, and legislators have enacted programs to reach students and engage them in successful reading programs. Early identification and intervention for struggling readers is necessary to rectify and prevent future reading problems. Teachers can identify the students through the use of benchmark assessments and use the data to arrange appropriate and differentiated instruction. The participating school used the small group pull out method for their intervention program. Students received daily 45-minute literacy instruction from a specified teacher. When they received the treatment and intervention early on in their academic careers, it can help to prevent future reading struggles. I aimed to determine the effectiveness of early intervention program on the reading levels of first grade students and if the program is the program is an effective method. The data scores

were used by local school administrators and teacher members to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the program, its design, and its impact on student achievement.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

Reading is an important life skill that begins at an early age and is critical to future success. Many elementary schools face a growing number of young students who have reading difficulties. Petursdottir et al. (2009) explained that competent reading skills are a cornerstone for student success because they apply to a student's learning capacity for various subjects. Early reading plays a vital role in other academic areas and continued education progress. Whitehurst and Lonigan (2002) concluded that among many students with serious problems in reading, those who eventually dropped out of high school ranged from 10% to 15%, with only 2% completing a four-year college program. Early detection of reading difficulties in young students is key in order to intervene and instruct individually. In order to improve the reading skills of the students, local schools utilize intervention programs.

Intervention programs in schools aim to reach students as early as possible in order to maximize gains and effectiveness. If students are not meeting the required reading standards then they will receive extra small group reading instruction based on individual goals and specific strategy instruction while their progress is closely monitored. The program evaluation serves as a tool to evaluate the effectiveness of the current intervention program in the participating elementary school. Slavin (2008) explained that program evaluations are instruments that solve problems and provide stakeholders with information and recommendations that impact policy decision. The goal is to gather all information and data so the program is accurately understood and its



impact is determined. The purpose of this summative program evaluation was to determine if the EIP program in an elementary school was effective in achieving state standardized reading levels for first grade students.

The present program evaluation was of service to two populations within the participating school. The first population was the students who were identified as struggling readers and who are performing below the grade level standards. The second population was the teachers and administrators of the school who were responsible for making the decisions that concern the intervention program.

The district currently did not have any evaluation information concerning the program (T. Gallagher, intervention teacher, personal communication, October 12, 2014). Gilbert et al. (2013) explains that implemented intervention programs should be researched based and continually evaluated to determine when modifications are needed. The district did not have a role in the evaluation. The social change was relevant for these populations as the knowledge of the program and its effectiveness grows. This knowledge can help decision makers become more informed. Teachers and administrators will be able to make better decisions and policies based on the data from the evaluation and students will be served through the best means.

The research question guiding this study was as follows: What is the effect of the Early Intervention Program on the benchmark reading assessment scores of struggling readers? This evaluation was chosen in order to determine the effectiveness of the program and if the model that is currently implemented is the best choice to improve students' reading scores. This evaluation was goals based in order to measure the

effectiveness of the intervention program in raising reading levels for first grade struggling readers and their ability to meet state mandated reading standards.

### **Methodology**

In order to place students in the intervention program, teachers administer an assessment tool, the Fountas and Pinnell (2013) benchmark. The benchmark is used to measure the student's current instructional reading level. The assessment is district mandated and administered district wide. It is part of the districts' assessment process each school year. The students were administered the assessment in conjunction with school policy and were therefore identified prior to the start of the research and subsequently throughout the research process while they received the intervention. The students were assessed on a bi weekly basis during the 30 weeks of the intervention. Assessments were first administered in the fall to create the baseline data for the students.

### **Research Design**

The first grade students who were enrolled in and participating in the EIP program were identified by their classroom teacher through the use of Fountas and Pinnell's benchmark assessments and a state created EIP rubric. These assessments identified the students as below grade level and in need of extra support. The overarching goal of reading EIP is to engender phonemic awareness, reading fluency and automaticity, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension in struggling readers (Bowyer-Crane et al., 2009). Students in the EIP program were pulled out from the classroom during a daily 30-minute period to receive extra reading instruction from the EIP teacher. The teacher is required to have a state reading endorsement on their educator

certificate as well as continuing district training in the area of reading intervention.

McDonald, Jacobsons, Crow, and Meadows (2010) believed the interventions must be taught by skilled and trained educators who incorporate a variety of instructional practices learned through ongoing professional development and training. This instruction was in addition to the 90-minute literacy instruction they receive in the regular classroom. Teachers in the EIP program used various research-based strategies to assist students in their learning. These strategies included oral reading, higher level questioning, building vocabulary, guided choral and paired reading, and blending and segmenting phonemes. The design was a single subject methodology. Riley-Tilman and Burns (2009) recommend that single subject methodology is ideal for educational practice because it allows the educator to make confident decisions concerning interventions and does not require a control group. The scores studied and analyzed were those of the students who remained in the intervention for the entire academic year.

### **Procedures for Study**

This quantitative based program evaluation began with the administration of the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment by classroom teachers. This measure determined the student's current instructional reading level, which is expected to be at level four or higher. Students falling beneath that expectation and who showed signs of need were recommended to the program. Classroom teachers completed the state EIP rubric. The state requires a score of 13 or below on the rubric to be qualified for the program.

Students falling within these parameters then received the intervention of the EIP program. They received this intervention on a daily basis for 30 minutes. During the yearlong intervention process the differentiated instruction received by the students served as the independent variable. The dependent variable was the student's response to the intervention and the subsequent reading level score on the benchmark.

### **Setting and Sample**

The district where this program evaluation took place is the largest school district in the state. It is 432 square miles, houses 132 schools, and is divided into 18 clusters. Over 168,600 students are enrolled in 77 elementary schools, 26 middle schools, 19 high schools, and four charter schools. Over 20,000 people are employed by the system.

The school where this evaluation was implemented is in a suburban community north of the capital city. The school has been open for 14 years and was built to house students due to rapidly increasing population in the area. The school houses prekindergarten through fifth grades, including prekindergarten special needs, severe and profound, autism, and resource special education programs. At the time of the study, the school had 879 students enrolled. The ethnic make-up of the school was 14% Asian, 22% Black/African American, 24% Hispanic or Latino, 4% Multiracial, and 35% White. Special education students made up 10% of the population, 6% were ESOL, and 47% received free or reduced lunch.

A one group, naturally formed convenience sample was used in this study. According to Creswell (2003) this kind of sampling is non random and participants are chosen based on availability and convenience. Grouping of students was based on the pre

assessment data and grouped accordingly by grade level. The participants consisted of 32 students, including 15 boys and 17 girls. Fourteen of the students were African American, nine Caucasian, two of bi racial descent, and seven Hispanic or Latino descent. Seventeen of the students received free or reduced lunch, a national program that is often used as a measurement of socioeconomic status. The lowest 40 first grade students, based on the benchmark and rubrics, were placed into the EIP program with parent consent. According to the state mandates, the number cannot exceed 40 students. This sample includes the 32 students who remained in the program the entire academic year. The students were assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment on a bi-weekly basis due to district mandated assessment process. One EIP teacher served students who were given support in reading intervention.

All 32 students continued to receive daily regular education classroom reading instruction for 75 minutes. The students were pulled out from this class during another segment of time to receive their 30-minute daily EIP instruction. For all students this was their first year in the program.

### **Instrumentation and Materials**

This evaluation used the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment. Benchmarks are used to identify a student's reading level. Darling-Hammond (2010) recommends using quality and research based assessments to understand the needs of individual students. Use of the assessment is required by the district to verify independent and instructional reading levels and indicate where students fall within the allocated standards. "The benchmark is the level of a text a reader can process effectively that is,

with high accuracy and comprehension” (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009, p. 45). In order to identify appropriate placement, the classroom teacher administers the assessment to individual students. In these contexts, the student orally reads an unfamiliar text while the teacher records miscues, omissions, additions, and errors. Comprehension is assessed through questioning the reader and having the reader recall specific information and details of the text. This process, called *running records* (Clay, 2000), is commonly used as an assessment tool in many elementary classrooms and assigns the student to a reading level from one to 26.

This program evaluation provides data that demonstrates growth in benchmark assessments of the students receiving the intervention.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Overarching Research Question: What is the effect of the Early Intervention Program used at the participating elementary school on the reading levels of struggling first grade readers?

Guiding Research Question: What is the effect of the Early Intervention Program on the benchmark reading assessment scores of struggling readers?

*Ho*: There is no significant difference between the end of year benchmark reading assessment achievement for students enrolled in the intervention program.

*H1*: There is significant difference between the end of year benchmark reading assessment scores for students enrolled in the intervention program.

The independent variable was the instructional strategies used by the EIP teacher. The dependent variable was the response to the program.

Data collection occurred on a bi-weekly basis. Students were given a Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment to assess their reading level and determine if growth had occurred. This data was documented and recorded by the EIP teacher on a state provided pre-existing Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in order to code and record the reading scores.

The archived reading data was then analyzed using a chi square test. Gravetter and Wallnau (2013) explain the general goal of a chi-square test is to compare observed frequencies with the null hypothesis. I used this test to attempt to test the theory that outside intervention and the use of differentiated reading instruction will in turn increase the reading level of the students. Using this test allowed me to determine if the differences in the reading levels are statistically significant and not due to chance.

### **Results**

The results were significant,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 32) = 13.386, p < .001$ . The chi-square test rejects the null hypothesis.

At the start of the 2013 – 2014 academic school year all 32 of the students were not meeting grade level reading standards. In May of the school year 27 of the students were meeting or exceeding grade level reading standards. Using this test allowed me to determine if the differences in the reading levels are statistically significant and not due to chance. These results suggest that the interventions put into place and delivered by the EIP teacher were effective for 84% of students receiving the intervention. At the start of the school year 100% of the students enrolled in the program were below grade level standards, meaning they were reading at a level four or below. After the students received the full year of the EIP 84% of the population was at or above grade level, meaning they

now read at a level 16 or higher. The results concluded that first grade students who received the program for the entire school year did make significant gains in their reading levels. At the start of the school year, none of the thirty-two students met grade level standards. Twenty-seven students were meeting or exceeding grade level reading standards upon completion of an entire school year of the intervention. These findings suggest that the early detection and intervention in reading for these students was effective.

This rejected the null hypothesis and there were significant differences between the beginning of the year reading benchmark score and the end of the year reading benchmark score. The mean score for the participants during the pre-benchmark assessment given at the start of the school year was a 1.97 meaning the average reading level for the group was between levels one and two. The post benchmark given at the end of the school year yielded a mean of 9.06 meaning the participants grew to an average of a reading level of 9 (see Table 1).



Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations*

	Prebenchmark	Postbenchmark
<i>M</i>	1.97	9.06
<i>N</i>	32	32
<i>SD</i>	.740	1.999

**Assumptions**

Several assumptions were made during the design of this research process. They are as follows:

1. It is assumed that the classroom teacher and EIP teacher are continually adjusting their instructional strategies to meet the needs of the students based on continuous formal and informal assessments.
2. It assumed that the EIP teacher is using best practices instructional strategies during the allotted EIP times.
3. It is assumed that the students are actively participating and engaging in both classroom literacy blocks and EIP classes.

**Limitations**

There were limitations beyond my control that affected this study. I acknowledge and recognize the impact these limitations can have on the research. They are as follows:

- The reading instruction received in the regular classroom by the teacher due to the teaching methods may affect the results of the participant's benchmark assessments.
- Students may not receive differentiated guided reading instruction for their specific level in the regular classroom.
- Students may not be supported in the home environment or read on a nightly basis.
- The students' natural maturity level and their willingness to apply the strategies learned in the EIP program.
- The language ability of some students as some are classified English as second language students.
- The intellectual ability of some of the participants and the possibility they may be an unidentified special education student.
- The effort put forth by the student and the attempt to utilize the learned strategies. Dunn (2010) explains the amount of effort executed by the student is critical to their learning.

### **Protection of Participants' Rights**

Protecting the rights of the participants of this study is a vital concern. The principal of the participating elementary school has carefully reviewed the project and determined the study has proposed no threat to the rights and protections of the students involved. I have presented this project to the IRB for review as well and it has determined the risk the study will have on the rights of the participants. No reading data was

collected until the IRB gave approval to the study. All documents were approved and signed by the IRB and the principal. The principal and other administrative members had no influence on the data or scores as this data is state mandated and is reported to the state education department throughout the school year. The coded data is securely stored for five years in a locked cabinet. The data with participant's information is property of the school will be safely secured in the school and has not been reviewed by the researcher.

The data collected through this study was anonymously coded by the EIP teacher at the participating elementary school, as required by the state. I did not have access to the codes and only received anonymous data to evaluate.

My role in the elementary school as a third grade teacher is separate from first grade and the EIP program. I am not a member of the first grade team and I do not teach any students in my classroom who receive the intervention program. My position as an educator at the school had no impact on the data or results. The EIP teacher was informed of the study and provided the anonymous data to me.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

This study provided data concerning the effectiveness of an elementary school EIP in reading. No evaluation data was available for the program and Schmoker (2009) explained that data helps identify priorities for improvement. The evaluation, research, and findings of this program evaluation provide information to assist with the local school reading problem and the schools' intervention program that responds to that need. An evaluation report was prepared to serve as the project portion of this study. The evaluation report was prepared to inform the local school principal about the data and results concerning the reading intervention program in order to make decisions about the program.

#### **Description and Goals**

The goal of this evaluation report project was to inform the local school administration about the data and findings of the program evaluation performed on the EIP for first grade students. At the participating elementary school, 32 first graders received a yearlong service from the intervention program. These students struggled to read on a first grade level and lacked age appropriate reading and literacy skills. This school year was the first year in the program for all the students who were served. Providing the students with individualized small group reading lessons outside of the regular classroom was the design on the intervention program. All 32 students received daily literacy instruction inside their regular classrooms as well as an extra 30-minute daily instruction in the intervention program. Small groups of five to seven students to

received the intervention on a daily basis. This report (Appendix B) addressed the findings of the evaluation and addressed the local school problem of struggling first grade readers.

An introduction and purpose, the problem addressed, the program evaluation results and outcomes, and recommendations to address the problem are all included in the report.

### **Rationale**

The participating elementary school lacked data concerning the effectiveness of the EIP at the local school and the evaluation provided research based data about the effectiveness of the program. The evaluation report was used as the project to explain the results of the program evaluation and to assist local school administrators and leaders in making data driven decisions pertaining to the program through the report and the recommendations section. Being a system of world class schools is the vision of the participating district and in order to become a high level operating school system decisions should be guided by data and program that are implemented should have a high impact on student achievement. This goal is addressed in the report by providing relevant research data concerning the intervention program in response to the local problem of a high number of first grade students reading below the required grade level.

Current research and information is all provided in the evaluation report in order to help improve the reading levels of struggling first grade students at the local elementary school. Inclusion of teacher professional development in the area of reading intervention was highly recommended in the report.

### **Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this program evaluation was to evaluate the effectiveness of an EIP program and then provide a project of the evaluation report explaining the results and future recommendations. This literature review serves as an extension of the first literature review. Beginning with research of reading intervention used in the specific state school, professional development and teacher training, and concluding with evaluation reports is the sequence of this review. Boolean searches were used in the Walden University Online Library. Search terms included *early intervention reading program, teacher professional literacy development, literacy; early reading achievement, evaluation reports, reading program evaluations, and early literacy development*. The parameters used during the search were articles from 2009 or newer, peer reviewed, and experts in the field of literacy. The search also utilized websites, national reports, textbooks, and books.

### **Early Intervention in State Public Schools**

A program used to help struggling students is the EIP, which utilizes many aspects of the Reading Recovery Program but provides the instruction to small groups. The State Board of Education states that the purpose of the program is to provide additional instruction and resources in order to assist students who are not meeting grade level standards. Early intervention programs are research and scientifically based and are crucial to success for students who are below grade level. Tindall and Nisbet (2010) recommended that the programs should use scientifically based researched methods and include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Daily

small group literacy instruction is provided to students performing below grade level in order to have them obtaining grade level standards within the school year. Coyne et al. (2013) explained that the intervention program should operate with a framework that allows for modifications of instruction based on student mastery and needs. Using a pull out model, the teacher works with a small group of six to eight students who are reading on the same level. Individualized attention is given and differentiated specific instruction of skills are taught in the small group format. Through assessment the teacher can modify instruction as needed based on student performance. Reading intervention programs have a long history in the educational system; however, scholarship on the validity and effectiveness of these programs seem to be scarce (Coker, Astramovich, and Hoskins, 2006; Cohen, Furman, and Moser, 2007).

### **Program Evaluation**

Program evaluations are used in educational settings to review the effectiveness of an implemented program. Salvin (2008) reported that there are over 35 various types of program evaluations conducted in research, but the most common of these are goals-based evaluations, objectives-based evaluations, and process-based evaluations. Goals based evaluations measure effectiveness and the degree to which a program is meeting its goals, objectives based evaluations determine measure a specific target or outcome, while process based evaluations measure the way a program works or operates.

This research was a goals-based program evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the program and its goal to raise student achievement in reading. The decision and policy makers at the participating elementary school were given the data to

make informed, data driven, and goals based decisions concerning young students and their reading achievement. Reutzel, Petscher, and Spichtig (2012) explain that the current focus of education research is to provide the highest quality reading instruction to students. The participating school lacked any current and relevant research data pertaining to the program and its effectiveness of reading instruction. Prior to the research a needs assessment was conducted and determined the goals based evaluation was the most appropriate for the research.

This program evaluation was completed and leads to the results and the white paper report.

### **Evaluation Reports**

Evaluation reports exist to provide data and conclusions following a program evaluation. Giustini (2012) explains that this type of literature is not part of a traditional publishing cycle and is often used in research groups, universities, and government agencies. This project was prepared for the local school principal and administrative team. Mathews (2004) reported that evaluation reports can be utilized in an educational setting to enhance teaching and learning. This evaluation report project was utilized as a project to report the educational research findings in response to the local school reading problem and to inform school administrative leaders of the current evaluation data and present them with findings and recommendations.

### **Teacher Professional Development in Reading**

Ongoing teacher professional development is a method used to train and instruct classroom teachers on best practices and instructional strategies. The National Dyslexia



Association (2010) explained one of the most important factors to a child's reading success is their teacher. In order to improve student achievement in reading and assist struggling readers, classroom teachers should attend professional development sessions tailored to the specific instruction of reading skills. Swerling and Cheesnab (2012) state that teacher effectiveness is best nourished through professional development that involves pedagogical content for teaching reading. Through collaboration and skill development teachers can improve their craft and instructional strategies that can be utilized to improve the reading skills of a larger number of students. "Professional development allows teachers to collaborate and develop a consistency within their teacher to enhance student learning" (Ardenne et al., 2013, p. 145). Practices of the classroom teachers can be improved through professional development in order to aid in student reading achievement.

Specific intervention utilized in the local school as mandated by the state, the program evaluation utilized, and the evaluation report method, and teacher professional development in reading instruction were all reviewed.

### **Implementation**

This evaluation report project began with the evaluation and analysis of the results of the reading intervention program. Reading data was then analyzed and results were determined. Results shaped the report and it was presented to the leadership team at the participating elementary school. The local school principal agreed an evaluation report was an organized and efficient method of receiving the results.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

Several resources and supports contributed to this project. The research was conducted with the support of the local school administrative team and the EIP teacher. The archived coded data to analyze was all provided by the intervention teacher. The administrative teams also supported the project of the evaluation report and were open to receive it and the recommendations made.

### **Potential Barriers**

The only existing barrier to this evaluation report project is if the administrators decide to no longer accept the report and the findings.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The evaluation report will be presented to the principal when this study is complete and approved. The principal will schedule a time for a meeting in which I will present the report and the findings. I will be available for all questions and any other further information that is needed. I will also be willing and open to sharing the report and results with any other invested parties.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

My role in this project was to prepare and deliver the evaluation report as well as answering all questions related to the project and reporting to the administrative team of the local school. Should the administrative team choose to pursue the listed recommendations I would actively participate in the implementation.

### **Project Evaluation**

This program evaluation helps to bring about early detection and intervention in the participating elementary school. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2012) recommend that school services towards assessing risk and providing targeted instruction for high-risk students. Information about the improvements seen in student's literacy skills through the intervention program are all provided in the evaluation report. Leadership members of the participating school and district can utilize the results to understand the improvements made to students reading skills through the intervention program and how they can best use the program to reach all the students in need of intervention. This data was utilized in creating the evaluation report.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

Schools in the United States still struggle with students with reading difficulties. If the problem is not addressed and remedied earlier it can lead to long-term problems. Goodwin (2012) explains that when students are not assisted early it can become an overwhelming challenge to get students back on track, even when using interventions. Reading and literacy difficulties need to be discovered and addressed earlier to provide students with interventions and a higher chance of a solution to their struggles. This evaluation report provided current and relevant data concerning the intervention program and outlined recommendations concerning the future of the program. Wanzek, Wexler, Vaughn, and Ciullo (2010) report that student gains in reading are more likely to occur when educators provide explicit instruction in word study, word meaning, and comprehension, as well as improve their craft through professional learning activities.

Improvements and social change can all be made within the school by utilizing the provided data and report to make informed data-driven decisions concerning the program and utilizing teacher professional development in reading.

### **Local Community**

Higher population of readers who lack appropriate reading skills is a growing challenge for many school systems. One classroom teacher explained, “The number of students in my class who lack the ability to read on grade level grows each year and it’s a big challenge for me” (A. Johnson, classroom teacher, personal communication, October 7, 2014). Local schools as well as the classroom teachers, provide help for struggling students through the intervention program. However, prior to this program evaluation there was no data or relevant information pertaining to the effectiveness of the program. Early intervention and specific instruction of reading skills continues to be a very important dynamic in schools. Schmoeker (2011) reported that implementing such intervention lessons resulted in enormous gains. This program evaluation was implemented in the local participating school to address the lack of data concerning the program and its impact on first grade student reading achievement. Improvement of the program, possible program expansion, and teacher professional development sessions related to reading intervention are all recommendations based on the evaluation report and allow for further teaching training to improve student reading achievement.

### **Far-Reaching**

Young struggling readers is a problem that spans across the United States and is making a large impact on the society. The Council for the Advancement of Adult

Literacy (2011) explained that as of the year 2011 the United States was the only free-market country where the current generation was less well educated than the previous. The country provides a free education to all citizens but continues to see a decline in the literacy skills of its people. National legislation has seen many laws put into place to aide in this academic crisis. The most recent large-scale legislation was No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), which was created to address these deficits and have every child meeting or exceeding the standards set before them. Under the law, schools began using an increased amount of high stakes testing, required professional development, continued teacher evaluations, and data driven decisions.

This project contributes to the existing body of knowledge concerning early reading intervention. Reasonable recommendations in order to improve student learning and achievement are also provided. With this information and proof of gains the leaders can make more data-driven and informed decisions concerning to program, possible expansion of the program, and increased staff development for regular classroom teachers to begin to implement specific intervention strategies in their classroom to further each struggling readers. Gullo (2013) explains that data-driven decision making can be a powerful tool for revealing needed change, and for questioning long-held assumptions, as well as for facilitating communication with and among students, families and other colleague. If regular classroom teachers experience professional development and training concerning the intervention strategies the potential increases to each a larger number of struggling students. Classrooms teachers could be trained on the interventions and their implementation in the classrooms and could utilize these methods during the

small group reading instructional blocks. Students who are struggling but may not have been admitted to the intervention program could receive these interventions, strategies, and instruction, which can assist them in the reading and literacy skills.

### **Conclusion**

Increasing student achievement and academic gains constantly remains a focus for schools. Data driven measures are used to gauge student achievement and plan curriculum. National legislation such as NCLB has increased local school focus on these objectives and the goal for the year of 2014 was to have every student meeting or exceeding grade level reading standards. In response, local schools use intervention programs to increase academic achievement and aide struggling readers. A state designed intervention program is utilized at the participating school for reading and a program evaluation was performed to collect data related to its effectiveness and impact on student achievement. The results determined the program was effective in raising student reading achievement for students who remained in the program for an entire academic year.

An evaluation report was then prepared in order in form local school leadership concerning the program. The intervention program and the local school problem of low first grade reading achievement were addressed in the report and it was recommended that if financially possible the program is expanded and another teacher is available to teach additional intervention classes. Additionally, it was recommended to create and implement professional development experiences for teachers at the participating school. Professional development sessions would focus on the teaching of specific reading intervention skills utilized in the intervention program as well as how to successfully

implement these skills and strategies into the regular classroom and daily reading block.

If these strategies and skills were taught to the classroom teachers and they were able to implement them directly into their reading blocks then a larger number of students could receive the instruction and increase their reading and literacy skills. This instruction and intervention could aide students in higher academic gains in reading and promote social change within the participating school in addition to increased reading performance and reaching a larger number of struggling readers.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

Reflections and conclusions based upon this project are included in this section. This section also addresses the limitations and the strengths of the project, remediation of limitations, project development, and leadership and change. My reflections as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer are included and I explore the future implications and social change based on this project.

### **Project Strengths**

The project began with the evaluation data of a first grade reading intervention program. A strength of this project was the identification of this local problem. Cullinan (2013) reported that students who are not reading proficiently by fourth grade are four times more likely to drop out of school. The leaders of the school were provided with current data concerning the program and its impact on student reading achievement from the evaluation. Data driven decisions being made at the local school contributes to the strength of the project. “The participating school has a goal of becoming more data focused and data driven in our decisions, policies, and procedures” (P. Miller, elementary teacher, personal communication, January 11, 2014).

Continued support of the project and the actions of the administrative team were a large asset. The administrators supported the review of the program and are committed to using the evaluation report and making the best possible decisions with the current data. Operating with open engagement and exchange of ideas between leaders and teachers is essential for a highly functioning school. Abdulla, Ngang, and Mey (2010) report that



open communication between teachers and leaders, where the teachers feel valued and respected, is a key element of a successful school environment. Creating a school environment where teachers can present ideas and research and know they are supported creates a successful school where students can benefit.

Another strength is the recommendation for further staff development in literacy intervention. Teachers that teach EIP courses receive extra-specified training in the area of intervention and literacy skills. They are required to complete a state designed certification in the area of reading to earn an endorsement. Three graduate level courses with a focus on the professional development of teachers in the areas of reading instruction and assessment are included in the coursework. Specific skills are taught and implemented into their small group classes and have proven to provide gains in student achievement. Other schools and future generations can be impacted by this information by proving the need for extra teacher training. If classroom teachers are enabled with these skills then a larger number of students can be impacted. If there are students who are below grade level but not able to be admitted into the intervention program then they can still receive an amount of the services from the classroom teacher. Ongoing development programs should provide training for the intervention and classroom teachers alike. Continued and consistent development will enable all teachers to effectively instruct young readers using best practices.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

This program evaluation faced limitations that are in need of improvement. One limitation was the teaching strategies and methods used by the classroom teacher.

Students enrolled in the EIP program spent majority of their learning time with their classroom teacher. While enrolled in the program they spend approximately five hours with their classroom teacher each day and only 30 minutes with the intervention teacher. Teachers are certified through the state licensing institution and have received adequate degree coursework. The classroom teacher utilized processes and methods that were likely to have a large impact on the knowledge and achievement of the student. To promote best methods and practices it is recommended that the classroom teacher attend professional development trainings and work in collaborative planning opportunities with the intervention teacher. Administrators should provide scheduled learning opportunities for continual learning through these professional development session and collaboration processes.

One limitation was also the amount the students are reading nightly at home and the amount of quality language to which they are exposed. Researchers at Rice University (2014) explained the more reading and language exposure a child has, the more benefit for their reading and academic success. One way to address this limitation is to create a contract or plan with the parent about how much reading should be occurring at home with the student. The teacher can address this plan with a parent during open house at the school, a curriculum night, or through parent teacher conferences. A nightly reading log can be used to track daily reading time at home between the parent and child. If the parent can commit to this then the students are more likely to make larger gains in their reading.

Another limitation was the natural age and maturity of the participants. Humans grow, develop, and mature at various rates. Students at a more natural maturity rate may have been more engaged and more involved in their learning than the students who are not as mature. This was a limitation that was beyond my control.

A final limitation is with the evaluation report there is a limitation of implementation of the recommendations. The local school currently does have extra financial or human resources to implement the recommendations.

### **Scholarship**

This research project provided me with an experience beyond what I have previously experienced as a classroom teacher. As a society of educators we understand the importance of research and the value it plays in the academic future of students. This degree, however, did not come without challenges. At the start of this program I had to learn about more scholarly, scientific writing. I also had to learn about quality research and the methods in which to find it.

Time management and self-paced work also were a concern while working full time and raising a young family. I used the many resources available to help with writing development and time management of my doctoral study.

This study also provided me with a deeper depth of knowledge. I moved beyond other levels of education and simple information recall. I learned how to deeply understand information, research, and apply it within the school environment. This was very evident in conducting and analyzing my research data when I had to apply the

deeper knowledge and skills to understand the process of analysis and concluding results from the data.

I believe the greatest knowledge I learned was how to become a scholarly practitioner. I not only learned and understood the information but I learned how to apply it in a classroom and how to make a better learning environment.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

This project began with my deep love for reading and my passion for education. Upon completing my research I began to consider several options. I debated between designing professional development experiences, expanding the intervention, and the evaluation report. Upon conferring with my principal, a colleague, and my chair I decided the evaluation report was the best option to explain the data and convey my recommendations.

After the decisions upon the evaluation report I spent time researching and reviewing the various methods of organizing them. I met once again with my principal and colleague. We discussed the options for organization and they helped me to decide on a manner that would be both clear and concise for all parties involved. This meeting and planning also helped to determine the length and the format of the paper. We examined the various papers to determine which information was important and which format would provide the readers with the research needed.

Upon working on the evaluation report I took time to evaluate my progress. This allowed me to determine the status of my work. I shared copies with a colleague who helped with revisions and helped me to understand the best method of reporting the data.

This was useful in understanding my audience and their needs. The evaluation was a critical element in the writing of the paper.

### **Leadership and Change**

This project helped me to understand that change and leadership in education require a team effort, continuous evaluation, and involvement. Leadership can come from all levels within a school and extend into the district and state levels. Adams, Morehead, and Sledge (2009) report that school improvement can no longer rest on the shoulders of the principal alone. I also realized how important it is for the leaders to create an open environment where the teachers are able to express thoughts and ideas. Data driven changes and policies can be made at the district level to improve student by involving classroom teachers and school administrators in the development process. Allowing all parties to be involved in the decision process can create professional development opportunities, learning experiences, and school programs that are effective and productive.

Leadership in the schools exists at various levels but is vital to the climate of the school, its success, and its impact on student achievement. Successful leaders are able to analyze, make important decisions, consider input, and vision improvement. I have always considered myself somewhat of a leader. If I was passionate about something I always wanted to help make it better. This doctoral process has provided me with the opportunity to examine myself as a leader in my career. Until now I have not taken on any leadership roles in my career. Through my study process I have seen how to evolve

as a leader and a researcher. I understand how to research, analyze data, and use it in the best possible manner for the most effective change.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar, Practitioner, and Project Developer**

I have spent four years as doctoral student at Walden University and I have grown as a student, a teacher, and a person. This program has engaged me in learning and understanding on a much deeper level than I ever expected. I have learned a great deal about education from the perspective of a scholar and an educator. I developed on a scholarly level through learning how to conduct purposeful and meaningful research. I learned the process of research from beginning to end and understand all the steps and how hard one must work to conduct proper and efficient research. I expanded my knowledge base through the use the Walden library and access to thousands of scholarly articles and rich literature concerning my topic. I learned how to search and discover meaningful articles and literature as well use them as a base for my personal research. This technique showed me how much educators can work together to share ideas and improve student learning. This process has also revealed how important it is to become a teacher leader within my own school and environment. As a teacher we can no longer stay complacent and wait for others to make the choices and decisions that drive our instruction. We must use scholarly methods to collect data and report our findings that can drive and influence classroom instruction and student achievement. Teachers have the greatest influence on a child and their learning and we must become the voices for our students.

As a practitioner I have learned I must continually work and develop my craft. I can no longer rely simply on my knowledge and years of experience to enhance my practice. When I discover a problem in my classroom or my local school I must take action as an active practitioner and actively work to discover a solution to the problem. I have learned to never become complacent in this career. I must continually evolve myself through professional development and research. I must take on a more active role within my school. I must use my passion for reading and the knowledge I have learned through this problem to create change that can be life changing for struggling readers.

When beginning this development of this project I was very overwhelmed and I doubted my ability to achieve a successful project study and program evaluation. Through the help of my many professors and doctoral chair I was able to develop a deep understanding of each process. With this knowledge I understand that I must continue to use these methods to evaluate and improve upon the reading programs, both regular classroom, and intervention, and the professional knowledge of my fellow teachers. This is now a calling and a mission for me that I must continue to improve the academic future of the children that I will teach.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

This evaluation report was a report of a program evaluation was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of an EIP in reading that lacked any research or data relevant to its effectiveness. This data was collected with the intention of having a positive impact on student reading achievement and future academic success. The analysis consisted of

comparing the reading scores of struggling first grade EIP students prior to the intervention and after receiving the intervention for one academic year.

A wealth of information was gathered through the evaluation, data collection, and analysis. This includes leaders at the local school as well as the district. The program previously had no data related to its effectiveness and continued to operate in the same small group pull out model it had chosen in previous years. The local school principal had chosen the model implemented at the local school. The evaluation report reports this information and allowed the school leaders to become informed decision makers and understand the choices based on current data.

Reading is an issue that remains in the forefront of educational policies and practices. Despite legislations and changes the country educators in the state still face reading issues. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (2012) reported that of citizens sixteen years of age or older living in the participating county where the study was conducted, 22% of them lacked basic fundamental reading skills. This is not only a local problem but a global problem as well. This project helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the issue and how educators and policy makers can work together to address it at various levels.

This social change can also impact other programs within the local school that also lack reports. National legislation has also created a program closely related to the intervention program called Response to Intervention (RtI). This program is the 3-tier method and system in which teachers follow when a student is performing below grade level and in need of assistance. Denton (2012) explains that RtI in early reading operates



with the goal of closing the performance gap between at-risk and typically developing students. A report of this program could lead local school leaders to determine which tiers and strategies are effective for students and discover what possible changes could be made.

With continued evaluation and reporting throughout the school it could also create the climate of the school becoming data driven. This could allow for teachers to become evaluators and reporters of their own practices and use data to drive their classrooms and instructions.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

Reading intervention and struggling readers are a topic that will require continued research and reporting in local schools. They will continue to be a part of the landscape of education policies. The goal of all schools is to produce successful and educated students. With the current implementation and legislation of Common Core State Standards (2013) the goal is produce students who are college and career ready. In order to be ready for college level academics and careers students must have a strong foundation of literacy skills. Based on this goal and the results of the study the recommendation is made that students struggling with reading skills and who are performing below grade level are remediated through the use of the intervention program. It is also recommended that the program be expanded to reach a larger number of struggling students. The significant gains made by the students completing the program reveal the quality and success of the program. If the program is expanded then a larger number of struggling students can be served.

It is also recommend that further research be conducted concerning other local schools as well as the other models of the program. This study was conducted at the participating school and only examined the effect of the small group pull out model of the program using first grade students. This may not be transferrable to other models of the intervention program that may be utilized by other local schools or to other grade levels that participate in the program.

### **Conclusion**

The state board of education reported that in 2012, 55% of third grade students passed the state reading assessment; the next year only 33% passed the assessment. The reading standards and assessments for elementary students continue to become more rigorous and many more students are falling below the required standards. For years local school and districts have implemented intervention programs to address these issues and to increase student achievement. This program evaluation began due to the lack of any research pertaining to the effectiveness of the intervention program utilized at the participating elementary school. The specially trained EIP teacher used the small group pull out method to instruct struggling first grade readers. The skills and strategies used by the intervention program reveal their importance and effectiveness. Stotsky and Wurman (2010) reported that teachers who have received extensive training are an important factor in addressing the literacy problem.

The research prompted the evaluation report presented to the school leaders concerning the program. The results of this study and report supported the academic gains and progress made by students enrolled in the program.

Educators, leaders, and policy makers alike are tasked with creating and implementing programs, providing quality instruction for struggling readers, and making decisions that are data driven. This combined with the increased rigor of the common core standards requires many districts to rely heavily on their intervention programs to meet requirements of student achievement. Using evaluation methods to better understand the intervention programs allows for decision makers to be well informed and make choices based on current and relevant data. Presenting the data using an evaluation report allows for current data to be reported and understood by the local leaders and stakeholders. Data can often be very difficult to understand and interpret. The report allows for the results to be clearly reported and understood by all involved parties.

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## Appendix A: State EIP Rubric

<b>First Grade EIP Rubric</b>
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Student \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*This rubric has been referenced to the GPS for reading and math. The content standards are listed. Students may qualify for EIP specifically in reading and/or math.*

Has the student been previously retained?    Yes    No                      In what grade? \_\_\_\_\_

Has the student been previously enrolled in EIP?    Yes    No                      In what grade? \_\_\_\_\_

Previous year G-KIDS results (by elements):    Reading \_\_\_\_\_    Math \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Reading/Language Arts</b>
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Reading	1 Not Yet/ Rarely 0-25%	2 Sometimes 26-50%	3 Most of the Time 51-75%	4 Consistently 76-100%	Score Column
Concepts of Print (ELAKR1c)	Tracks text read from left-to-right and top-to-bottom.	Tracks text read from left-to-right and top-to-bottom.	Tracks text read from left-to-right and top-to-bottom.	Tracks text read from left-to-right and top-to-bottom.	
Concepts of Print (ELAKR1d)	Distinguishes between written letters, words, and sentences.	Distinguishes between written letters, words, and sentences.	Distinguishes between written letters, words, and sentences.	Distinguishes between written letters, words, and sentences.	
Phonological Awareness (ELAKR2a)	Identifies and produces rhyming words in response to an oral prompt and distinguishes rhyming and non-rhyming words.	Identifies and produces rhyming words in response to an oral prompt and distinguishes rhyming and non-rhyming words.	Identifies and produces rhyming words in response to an oral prompt and distinguishes rhyming and non-rhyming words.	Identifies and produces rhyming words in response to an oral prompt and distinguishes rhyming and non-rhyming words.	
Phonological Awareness (ELAKR2e)	Blends spoken phonemes to make high frequency words.	Blends spoken phonemes to make high frequency words.	Blends spoken phonemes to make high frequency words.	Blends spoken phonemes to make high frequency words.	
Phonics (ELAKR3b)	Recognizes and names all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet.	Recognizes and names all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet.	Recognizes and names all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet.	Recognizes and names all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet.	
Phonics (ELAKR3c)	Matches all consonant and short-vowel sounds to appropriate letters.	Matches all consonant and short-vowel sounds to appropriate letters.	Matches all consonant and short-vowel sounds to appropriate letters.	Matches all consonant and short-vowel sounds to appropriate letters.	
Phonics (ELAKR3e)	Applies learned phonics skills when reading words and sentences in stories.	Applies learned phonics skills when reading words and sentences in stories.	Applies learned phonics skills when reading words and sentences in stories.	Applies learned phonics skills when reading words and sentences in stories.	
Fluency (ELAKR4a,b)	Reads previously taught high frequency words at the rate of 30 words correct per minute.	Reads previously taught high frequency words at the rate of 30 words correct per minute.	Reads previously taught high frequency words at the rate of 30 words correct per minute.	Reads previously taught high frequency words at the rate of 30 words correct per minute.	
Fluency (ELAKR4b)	Reads previously taught grade-level text with appropriate expression	Reads previously taught grade-level text with appropriate expression	Reads previously taught grade-level text with appropriate expression	Reads previously taught grade-level text with appropriate expression	
Comprehension (ELAKR6b,c,g)	Uses reading strategies (predicting, asking and answering questions and making connections) to understand text.	Uses reading strategies (predicting, asking and answering questions and making connections) to understand text.	Uses reading strategies (predicting, asking and answering questions and making connections) to understand text.	Uses reading strategies (predicting, asking and answering questions and making connections) to understand text.	
Comprehension (ELAKR6e)	Retells familiar events and stories to include beginning, middle and end.	Retells familiar events and stories to include beginning, middle and end.	Retells familiar events and stories to include beginning, middle and end.	Retells familiar events and stories to include beginning, middle and end.	
Writing (ELAKW1a)	Writes or dictates to describe familiar persons, places, objects or experiences.	Writes or dictates to describe familiar persons, places, objects or experiences.	Writes or dictates to describe familiar persons, places, objects or experiences.	Writes or dictates to describe familiar persons, places, objects or experiences.	

# **An Analysis of an Early Intervention Reading Program for First Grade Students**

Responding to Struggling Readers

Walden University  
A white paper by Elizabeth Matthews





## Introduction

In the United States of America there is a national literacy problem (Goldhaber, 2011; Mathes et al., 2005; Mellard and Jordan, 2010; Moore-Hart and Karabenick, 2009). Some students lack the necessary literacy skills and a strong foundation for reading. “Reading difficulties are the most frequent learning problem among students and the main reason for academic failure” (Rasinski and Hoffman, 2003, p. 43). Reading is a critical element to academic success and schools are facing a challenging time in providing quality reading instruction to all students. Reading skills extend across all academic areas and into future arenas of life. “The ability to read influences success in school, employment, and general quality of life” (Allor, Mathes, Roberts, Cheatham, and Otaiba, 2014, p. 287).

Local schools are tasked with remediation of students performing below the grade level standards. The local school faces a reading problem with first grade students (T. Gallagher, personal communication). These students lack the grade level appropriate reading skills and score below the standard set on benchmark assessments. If the problem is not addressed early the students may face continued academic problems.

In response to the problem and an attempt to close the achievement gap, students who are performing below grade level are recommended for the EIP (Early Intervention Program) in reading. The state designed program allows a reading endorsed and state certified teacher to utilize small group reading instruction and specific intervention strategies. The

local school chose to use the small group pull out model where students are instructed in a separate classroom, in groups of 5-7 for 30 minutes each day. They are assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment on a bi-weekly basis. The intervention teacher is responsible for the progress monitoring and differentiated instruction for the students. The program operates with the goal of 100% of the participants who complete the full year of the program reading at the grade level standard.

The program had been in operation at the school for several years but lacked any data or research related its effectiveness and impact on student achievement.

## **Students Reading Problems**

First grade students at the participating elementary school struggled with reading skills and strategies and thus, are not meeting the grade set standards set before them by the local school district. “30 percent of first grade students at the participating Elementary School are below grade level standards” (County Public Schools, 2013). Early reading problems can lead to future academic problems and students may continue to struggle throughout school. Landerl and Wimmer (2009) reported that 70% of struggling readers in grade 1 continued to struggle in grade 8 when no intervention was provided. To aid in combating this problem and meeting student needs, teachers identify struggling students and remediate with literacy instruction.

## **The Intervention Program**

The overarching goal of reading EIP is to engender phonemic awareness, reading fluency and automaticity, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension in struggling readers (Bowyer-Crane et al., 2009). Students in the EIP program are pulled out from the classroom during a daily 30-minute period to receive extra reading instruction from the EIP teacher. The teacher is required to have a state reading endorsement on their educator certificate as well as continuing district training in the area of reading intervention. McDonald, Jakobsons, Crow, and Meadows (2010) believed the interventions must be taught by skilled and trained educators who incorporate a variety of instructional

practices learned through ongoing professional development and training. This instruction is in addition to the 90-minute literacy instruction they receive in the regular classroom. Teachers in the EIP program use various research-based strategies to assist students in their learning. These strategies included oral reading, higher level questioning, building vocabulary, guided choral and paired reading, and blending and segmenting phonemes.

In order to be placed in the intervention program teachers administer an assessment tool, the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark (2013) and a state created EIP rubric (see Appendix A). The benchmark is used to measure the student's current instructional reading level. The assessment is district mandated and administered district wide. It is part of the districts' assessment process each school year. The students were administered the assessment in conjunction with school policy and were therefore be identified prior to the start of the research and subsequently throughout the research process while they were receiving the intervention.

### **What questions needed to be answered?**

1. What is the effect of the Early Intervention Program used at the participating elementary school on the reading levels of struggling first grade readers?
2. Are students enrolled in the program making significant progress?
3. Is the program reaching a sufficient amount of enrolled students?

## **How was the program evaluated?**

The students were assessed on a bi-weekly basis during the 30 weeks of the intervention.

The assessment was first administered in the fall to create the baseline data for the students. The program was evaluated using the first and last assessment scores for each student for the data.

The design was a single subject methodology. Riley-Tilman and Burns (2009) recommend that single subject methodology is ideal for educational practice because it allows the educator to make confident decisions concerning interventions and they do not require a control group. The scores studied and analyzed were those of the students who remained in the intervention for the entire academic year.

## **Procedures for Study**

This quantitative based program evaluation began with the administration of the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment by classroom teachers. This measure determined the student's current instructional reading level, which is expected to be at the level 4 or higher. Students falling beneath that expectation and who showed signs of need were recommended to the program. The classroom teachers completed the state EIP rubric. The state requires a score of 13 or below on the rubric to be qualified for the program.

The students who fell within these parameters then received the intervention. They received this intervention on a daily basis for 30 minutes. During the yearlong intervention process the differentiated instruction received by the students served as the independent variable. The dependent variable was the student's response to the intervention and the subsequent reading level score on the benchmark.

## **Setting and Sample**

The district where this program evaluation took place is the largest school district in the state. It is 432 square miles, houses 132 schools, and is divided into 18 clusters. Over 168,600 students are enrolled into 77 elementary schools, 26 middle schools, 19 high schools, and four charter schools. Over 20,000 people are employed by the system.

The school where this evaluation was implemented is in a suburban community north of the capital city. The school has been open for 14 years and was built to house students due to rapidly increasing population in the area. The school houses grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. This includes pre-kindergarten special needs, severe and profound, autism, and resource special education programs. The school had 879 students enrolled. The ethnic make-up of the school was 14% Asian, 22% Black/African American, 24% Hispanic or Latino, 4% Multiracial, and 35% White. Special education students made up 10% of the population, 6% were ESOL, and 47% received free or reduced lunch (County Public Schools, 2013).

A one group, naturally formed convenience sample was used in this study. According to Creswell (200, p.156) this kind of sampling is non-random and participants are chosen based on availability and convenience. The group of students will be based on the pre-assessment data and grouped accordingly by grade level. The participants consisted of 32 students. 15 were males and 17 females. 14 of the students were African American, 9 Caucasian, 2 of bi-racial descent, and 7 of Hispanic or Latino descent. Seventeen of the students received free or reduced lunch, a national program that is often used as a measurement of socioeconomic status. The lowest 40 first grade students, based on the benchmark and rubrics, were placed into the EIP program with parent consent. According to the state mandates the number cannot exceed 40 students. This sample includes the 32 students who remained in the program the entire academic year. The students were assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment on a bi-weekly basis due to district mandated assessment process. One EIP teacher served students who were given support in reading intervention.

All 32 students continued to receive daily regular education classroom reading instruction for 75 minutes daily. The students were pulled out from this class during another segment of time to receive their 30-minute daily EIP instruction. For all students this was their first year in the program.

## **Data and Evaluation**

This evaluation used the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment. Benchmarks are used to identify a student's reading level. Darling-Hammond (2010) recommends using quality and research based assessments to understand the needs of individual students. The school district requires the use of this assessment to verify independent and instructional reading levels and indicate where students fall within the allocated standards. "The benchmark is the level of a text a reader can process effectively that is, with high accuracy and comprehension" (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009, p. 45). In order to identify appropriate placement, the classroom teacher administers the assessment to individual students. In these contexts, the student orally reads an unfamiliar text while the teacher records miscues, omissions, additions, and errors. Comprehension is assessed through questioning the reader and having the reader recall specific information and details of the text. This process, called running records (Clay, 2000) is commonly used as an assessment tool in many elementary classrooms, and assigns the student to a reading level from 1 to 26.

This program evaluation provides data that demonstrates growth in benchmark assessments of the students receiving the intervention.

## **Data Analysis**

A program evaluation was performed utilizing the archived coded data for 32 students who participated in the reading intervention program. At the start of the program all 32 students were reading below grade level, which means they were a level 4 or below. The



students remained in the intervention program for the entire year and received the daily 30 minute support.

The collection of the data occurred on a bi-weekly basis. The students were given a Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment to assess their reading level and determine if growth had occurred. This was documented and recorded by the EIP teacher. The state provided the EIP teacher with a pre-existing Microsoft excel spreadsheet in order to code and record the student's data.

The archived data was analyzed using a chi square test. Gravetter and Wallnau (2013, p.475) explain the general goal of a chi-square test is to compare observed frequencies with the null hypothesis. I used this test to attempt to test the theory that outside intervention and the use of differentiated reading instruction will in turn increase the reading level of the students. Using this test allowed me to determine if the differences in the reading levels are statistically significant and not due to chance.

## **Results**

At the start of the 2013 – 2014 academic school year all 32 of the students were not meeting grade level reading standards. In May of the school year 27 of the students were meeting or exceeding grade level reading standards. Using this test allowed me to determine if the differences in the reading levels are statistically significant and not due to chance. The chi-square test will reject or fail the hypothesis. These results suggest that

the interventions put into place and delivered by the EIP teacher were effective for 84% of students receiving the intervention. At the start of the school year 100% of the students enrolled in the program were below grade level standards, meaning they were reading at a level 4 or below. After the students received the full year of the EIP intervention 84% of the population was at or above grade level, meaning they now read at a level 16 or higher. The results concluded that first grade students who received the program for the entire school year did make significant gains in their reading levels. At the start of the school year zero out of thirty two of the students did not meet grade level standards. Upon receiving the full year of EIP instruction 27 students were meeting or exceeding grade level reading standards. These findings suggest that the early detection and intervention in reading for these students was effective.

This rejected the null hypothesis and there were significant differences between the beginning of the year reading benchmark score and the end of the year reading benchmark score. The mean score for the participants during the pre-benchmark assessment given at the start of the school year was a 1.97 meaning the average reading level for the group was between levels 1 and 2. The post benchmark given at the end of the school year yielded a mean of 9.06 meaning the participants grew to an average of a reading level of 9 (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations*

Report		
	Pre Benchmark	Post Benchmark
Mean	1.97	9.06
N	32	32
Std. Deviation	.740	1.999

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** The EIP program at the local elementary school continues as it has. The gains made by students are evidence that the program is successful at closing the achievement gap with the students who were served.

**Recommendation 2:** The local school implements professional development focused on the teaching of reading intervention skills. Using the skills and knowledge taught to the EIP teacher, classroom teachers can receive a monthly professional development session targeted at teaching these skills. This will allow the classroom teachers to begin to implement these strategies into their classrooms and reach a larger

number of students who may have not been served in the EIP program. Swerling and Cheesnab (2012) state that teacher effectiveness is best nourished through professional development that involves pedagogical content for teaching reading. Through collaboration and skill development teachers can improve their craft and instructional strategies that can be utilized to improve the reading skills of a larger number of students. “Professional development allows teachers to collaborate and develop a consistency within their teacher to enhance student learning” (Ardenne et al., 2013, p. 145). The development model can work to improve the practices of the classroom teachers in order to aide in student reading achievement.

**Recommendation 3:** The local school continues to observe the data from the program and use the data to make data driven decisions concerning the program. Gullo (2013) explains that data-driven decision making can be a powerful tool for revealing needed change, and for questioning long-held assumptions, as well as for facilitating communication with and among students, families and other colleagues.

## **Conclusion**

Educators, leaders, and policy makers alike are tasked with creating and implementing programs, providing quality instruction for struggling readers, and making decisions that are data driven. This combined with the increased rigor of the common core standards requires many districts to rely heavily on their intervention programs to meet requirements of student achievement. Using evaluation methods to better understand the

intervention programs allows for decision makers to be well informed and make choices based on current and relevant data.

This evaluation report of the program evaluation performed on the EIP reading program at the local elementary school. The program evaluation was conducted in order to determine if the students enrolled in the program were making statistically significant gains and determine the effectiveness of the program. The analysis determines that the program was successful in improving the reading scores of the students on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment.

It is recommended the school continue the program and conduct professional learning opportunities for classroom teachers. The sessions should focus on the teaching and implementation of specific reading intervention skills. This will allow for a larger number of students to receive the successful reading instruction and lead to larger number of successful students.

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## First Grade EIP Rubric

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*This rubric has been referenced to the GPS for reading and math. The content standards are listed. Students may qualify for EIP specifically in reading and/or math.*

Has the student been previously retained?      Yes      No      In what grade? \_\_\_\_\_

Has the student been previously enrolled in EIP?      Yes      No      In what grade? \_\_\_\_\_

Previous year G-KIDS results (by elements):      Reading \_\_\_\_\_      Math \_\_\_\_\_

### Reading/Language Arts

Reading	1 Not Yet/ Rarely 0-25%	2 Sometimes 26-50%	3 Most of the Time 51-75%	4 Consistently 76-100%	Score Column
Concepts of Print (ELAKR1c)	Tracks text read from left-to-right and top-to-bottom.	Tracks text read from left-to-right and top-to-bottom.	Tracks text read from left-to-right and top-to-bottom.	Tracks text read from left-to-right and top-to-bottom.	
Concepts of Print (ELAKR1d)	Distinguishes between written letters, words, and sentences.	Distinguishes between written letters, words, and sentences.	Distinguishes between written letters, words, and sentences.	Distinguishes between written letters, words, and sentences.	
Phonological Awareness (ELAKR2a)	Identifies and produces rhyming words in response to an oral prompt and distinguishes rhyming and non-rhyming words.	Identifies and produces rhyming words in response to an oral prompt and distinguishes rhyming and non-rhyming words.	Identifies and produces rhyming words in response to an oral prompt and distinguishes rhyming and non-rhyming words.	Identifies and produces rhyming words in response to an oral prompt and distinguishes rhyming and non-rhyming words.	
Phonological Awareness (ELAKR2e)	Blends spoken phonemes to make high frequency words.	Blends spoken phonemes to make high frequency words.	Blends spoken phonemes to make high frequency words.	Blends spoken phonemes to make high frequency words.	
Phonics (ELAKR3b)	Recognizes and names all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet.	Recognizes and names all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet.	Recognizes and names all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet.	Recognizes and names all uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet.	
Phonics (ELAKR3c)	Matches all consonant and short-vowel sounds to appropriate letters.	Matches all consonant and short-vowel sounds to appropriate letters.	Matches all consonant and short-vowel sounds to appropriate letters.	Matches all consonant and short-vowel sounds to appropriate letters.	
Phonics (ELAKR3e)	Applies learned phonics skills when reading words and sentences in stories.	Applies learned phonics skills when reading words and sentences in stories.	Applies learned phonics skills when reading words and sentences in stories.	Applies learned phonics skills when reading words and sentences in stories.	
Fluency (ELAKR4a,b)	Reads previously taught high frequency words at the rate of 30 words correct per minute.	Reads previously taught high frequency words at the rate of 30 words correct per minute.	Reads previously taught high frequency words at the rate of 30 words correct per minute.	Reads previously taught high frequency words at the rate of 30 words correct per minute.	
Fluency (ELAKR4b)	Reads previously taught grade-level text with appropriate expression	Reads previously taught grade-level text with appropriate expression	Reads previously taught grade-level text with appropriate expression	Reads previously taught grade-level text with appropriate expression	
Comprehension (ELAKR6b,c,g)	Uses reading strategies (predicting, asking and answering questions and making connections) to understand text.	Uses reading strategies (predicting, asking and answering questions and making connections) to understand text.	Uses reading strategies (predicting, asking and answering questions and making connections) to understand text.	Uses reading strategies (predicting, asking and answering questions and making connections) to understand text.	
Comprehension (ELAKR6e)	Retells familiar events and stories to include beginning, middle and end.	Retells familiar events and stories to include beginning, middle and end.	Retells familiar events and stories to include beginning, middle and end.	Retells familiar events and stories to include beginning, middle and end.	
Writing (ELAKW1a)	Writes or dictates to describe familiar persons, places, objects or experiences.	Writes or dictates to describe familiar persons, places, objects or experiences.	Writes or dictates to describe familiar persons, places, objects or experiences.	Writes or dictates to describe familiar persons, places, objects or experiences.	